

Hazardous waste site draws concern

Council OKs city hall spending

EPA
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AUGUSTA — The Augusta City Council voted unanimously Wednesday to spend \$160,000 to make room for an entrance and parking lot for a new \$3.5 million city hall.

Councilors agreed to spend \$110,000 to buy a house at 8 Howard St., and \$50,000 to buy back a three-year lease for Fort Western Tire Co. on Bowman Street.

Both buildings share the same five-acre lot on the east bank of the Kennebec River where the city plans to build a 37,400-square-foot city hall. The city would have had to build a temporary entrance and parking lot for the new, three-story municipal home.

Money for the two deals approved Wednesday will be taken from the \$3.9 million approved last November by residents for the project that also includes the restoration of Fort Western museum, a National Historic Landmark.

The \$100,000 to be paid Earl and Joanne Eldredge covers the price of the 19th-century home, plus moving and legal expenses.

The council initially offered the couple \$100,000, but the price was increased after negotiations were made public, complicating the el-

derly couple's attempts to buy another home elsewhere in the city.

Elderly said the city hopes to move the house to city-owned property, then sell it to recover some of the costs incurred in the sale. The Eldredges have promised to leave by July 1, the city manager said.

The council also agreed to pay Frank Loiko of Fort Western Tire \$50,000 to surrender a lease the city negotiated last year.

The city bought the Bowman Street property for \$400,000, but agreed to lease the firm the retread plant until 1988, knowing it would need the property before the lease expired.

Elderly said Wednesday there was not enough support on the council initially to pay the \$450,000.

"We had opportunity to correct the situation and we did," Elderly said.

The firm has agreed to be off the premises by Oct. 1, the city manager said.

In other business, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency held a public hearing to review an agreement it has with Central Maine Power Co. to study hazardous waste contamination at the F. O'Connor scrapyard on Route 17.

The power company shipped its worn electrical transformers to the site off Eastern Avenue for nearly 30 years. Some of those transformers contained oil contaminated by PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — suspected cancer-causing elements.

The federal government has identified three contaminated areas at the 17-acre site. Two of those sites are enclosed within a chain-link fence, and one is outside the fence.

Jean Hussey, whose home abuts the scrapyard, learned of the third unenclosed site at the meeting.

"I had always assumed... all the PCB areas were contained in the fence," she said.

Hussey complained children played at the now-closed scrapyard all the time, and she asked if it would be possible to post signs or erect another fence until officials were sure the area was safe.

She was told she would have to wait until the study, which will define the nature and extent of contamination and recommend an appropriate clean-up method, has been completed.

Councilor Philip Gingrow wanted to know what had been done to warn people about possible water contamination in Riggs Brook, which runs through the scrapyard.

The Ward 8 city councilor said he lives within 200-300 feet of the brook.

Again, EPA officials said they could not tell the depth or extent of

the contamination until after the study.

Also at the meeting, councilors refused to approve an agreement that would have allowed a study group to negotiate with a New Hampshire firm for a 500-ton-per-day waste-to-energy plant in Augusta.

Councilors refused to OK the move because copies of the agreement were handed to them just minutes before the meeting, leaving them no time to review the three-page document.

The group, headed by Hallowell Mayor Barry Timson and charged with solving Augusta waste woes, has been working with Bath-Brunswick representatives for a regional solution to the growing shortage of landfill space.

Choice of the Hatch Hill Disposal Area for the trash-burning plant raised concerns about traffic, location of a secured landfill, and liability to the city.

The issue will be discussed again at Monday's regular council meeting.

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